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RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 BAKU 000969

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EB/ESC, EUR/CARC
DEPT FOR EB/ESC, EUR/CARC
DEPT FOR S/EEE AMB MORNINGSTAR AND DSTEIN
DEPT FOR EB/ESC DAS DOUG HENGEL
DEPT FOR S/CT FOR GROBERTSON, DKURSCH, CLARKS
DOE FOR LEKIMOFF, MBURPOE, AND DGOTTFRIED

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REF: A. BAKU 944
[1](#)B. BAKU 925
[1](#)C. BAKU 818

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Classified By: POL/ECON COUNSELOR ROBERT GARVERICK FOR
REASONS 1.4 (B,D, E)

Summary

[1](#)1. (S) In a 15 December meeting, Elshad Nassirov SOCAR Vice President described his December 14-15 trip to Tehran, accompanying Foreign Minister Mammadyarov. Nassirov told us this was their first trip back to Tehran since this year's disputed election. He described the atmosphere with Iranian interlocutors as profoundly different, as "tough, hostile." Nassirov assessed there were nationalistic trends among the ethnically Azeri population in Iran, with more Azeris speaking their language openly and identifying themselves as Azeri. Nassirov strongly pushed for US assistance on the Alborz issue, pressing his willingness to travel with Deputy Minister Khalofov to Washington, or entertain experts in Baku, to better understand how the GOAJ should handle this provocation. End Summary.

Atmospherics Tough, Iranians Watch their Words

[1](#)2. (C) In a 15 December meeting, Elshad Nassirov SOCAR Vice President described his December 14-15 trip to Tehran with Foreign Minister Mammadyarov. Nassirov told Energy Officer that this was Mammadyarov's first trip back to Tehran since the disputed election. Nassirov described the atmosphere with Iranian interlocutors as profoundly different than in the past. He characterized the atmosphere as "tough, hostile." He said that Iranian FM Mottaki did not even take Azerbaijani FM Mammadyarov out to lunch in a villa, the usual practice in a region which greatly values hospitality. Instead, the delegation was fed lunch at the Foreign Ministry. (Note: Nassirov did not seem personally insulted,

but objectively recognized it as a clear signal of a deteriorating relationship, the regional equivalent of being taken to McDonalds for a state affair. End note.) Nassirov stated that the Iranian's behavior was "much more deliberate, no word about our friendship with the U.S. or Israel, or even (complaints) about Zionism."

Azeri Iranian Nationalism Growing

¶3. (C) Nassirov assessed there were nationalistic trends among the ethnically Azeri population in Iran. He noted that in past visits, Azeri Iranians would not speak to the visiting Azerbaijanis in their common tongue. Now, he reported, some contacts openly spoke Azerbaijani to him. He also noted that in the past Azeri Iranians called themselves, "Iranians of Turkic origin." Now, he indicated, they frankly called themselves "Azeris."

Pushing the Iranians:
What are Your Intentions?

¶4. (S) At the end of long meeting, Nassirov arrived at the issue which most concerned him: the Iranian Alborz rig, now located in disputed Caspian waters. He and Energy Officer sketched a map of the disputed area. Pointing south of the modified median line (MML) proposal, Nassirov said, "The Iranians are here," referring to the Alborz rig. Drawing dots around the rig's location, he noted, "and Iranian shis are there." Pointing above the MML, he asked, "and what if we put our rig there? What are their intentions? Will the Iranians attack it? This is what FM Mammadyarov was asking (in Tehran)." (Note: Nassirov, a former Soviet diplomat,

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understands Azerbaijan's national interest in the Alborz situation in a way that many oil executives would not. End note.)

Well, the FM May not Know

¶5. (S) Nassirov told Energy Off that FM Mottaki had told the delegation that there was no Iranian intent to attack Azerbaijani vessels, or otherwise escalate the situation. This point seemed reassuring to the Azerbaijanis. However, Nassirov was clearly perturbed on another point: FM Mottaki "was not aware of the ships movements," that is, he was not aware there were Iranian military vessels in the vicinity of the Alborz. Nassirov wondered aloud if President Ahmadinejad perhaps controlled the vessels directly.

Nassirov Renews Plea for
US Assistance on Alborz

¶6. (S) Nassirov renewed his plea for assistance from the U.S. on the Alborz situation. "The FM cannot ask for help directly," he explained, alluding the political difficulties that would involve for the GOAJ. Instead, he suggested that SOCAR or others inside the government could provide a path for the USG to provide "informal" expert advice on how to handle the Alborz situation. He told Energy Officer that he and Deputy Foreign Minister Khalofov could travel to Washington to consult with US experts. Alternately, he indicated that U.S. experts would also be welcome in Baku. "We can talk here or there," Nassirov pressed.

Nassirov reiterated that Azerbaijan urgently needs advice on:

--whether to place a platform out near the Alborz, albeit north of the MML line;

--how to react were Iranian ships to cross the MML and interfere with an Azerbaijani oil rig;

--how the U.S. had handled border issues such as the demarcation of the Great Lakes, or other international maritime border disputes the U.S. had helped to resolve.

Nassirov Blames Russia
for Iranian Adventurism

¶7. (S) As in previous conversations, Nassirov blamed the Russians for claiming Azerbaijani oil fields in 1994, thereby undermining support for the 1943 treaty which established the Astara-Hasangulu line as the Soviet-Iranian maritime boundary. By Nassirov's interpretation, this Russian action undermined Azerbaijan's claims to the maritime boundary as a successor state to the Soviet Union, and opened the gate for Iranian attempts to revise the maritime boundary.

Another Wrinkle - Will Azerbaijani
Actions Upset Turkmenistan?

¶8. (S) Nassirov explained another wrinkle in the regional Caspian tangle - were Azerbaijan to broker an agreement with Iran ceding the waters between the MML and the Astara-Hasangulu line, Turkmenistan could take offense. Nassirov explained, such an agreement could imply that Turkmenistan's own territorial claim between the MML and the Astara-Hasangulu line, (essentially a mirror image of Azerbaijan's claim), would also be forfeit to Iran. Turkmenistan could interpret this as unwarranted interference in its affairs, and layer on a second Caspian dispute onto the nations' existing dispute over the ACG oil fields.

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Press: SOCAR Inks New
Gas Contract with Iran

¶9. (C) While in Tehran, Nassirov told us he was in negotiations with the National Iranian Gas Export Company (NIGEC). Like Mammadyarov, he found the reception chilly. Today's Azerbaijani press was full of reports of a new gas deal signed during the visit, although in our meeting, Nassirov did not mention a new contract, instead focusing on the issues outlined above. We will seek additional details on this contract, although recently Nassirov has told us the current deals with Iran are related to expansion of gas swaps to secure gas for Nakhchivan, the enclave region of Azerbaijan which directly borders Iran.

Comment

¶10. (S) Lacking many other easy options, FM Mammadyarov appeared to have put significant stock in his visit to Tehran to calm the Alborz issue (Ref b). That his primary interlocutor, FM Mottaqi, could potentially be so out of the loop (or at least, profess to be), as to be unaware of Iranian naval vessels protecting the Alborz, appears to have raised at least Nassirov's sense of urgency. FM Mottaqi's apparent ignorance of the details of the situation begs the question - what is to be gained from discussions with a FM who may not be apprised of the issue at hand? The broader question hanging in the air after the meeting with Nassirov was, 'how should Azerbaijan carry out a relationship with its neighbor, when the Iranian MFA may be cut out of key information?' That said, Nassirov has been tougher on Iran than the FM in the past. The Charge is seeking a meeting with FM Mammadyarov to better understand first-hand his discussions in Tehran. End comment.

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